

Asset Building and Community Development in Singapore

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Background

Singapore is city-state approximately 4.4 times smaller than Rhode Island (which is the smallest U.S. state) but has 5 times the people (5.64 million to be exact). The official language is English and the four main ethnic groups are Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Other (in order of majority to minority in numbers). It is a racially and religiously diverse country with a positive net migration rate, meaning there are more people entering to work and live in Singapore than people leaving the country.

Field Placement

I was placed at SCC FSC, which is a non-governmental agency that provides case management, community development programming, and open activity space.



Lessons Learned

1. I keep finding myself resisting what is naturally happening. This summer taught me how to be more accepting of change.
2. Sometimes it is nice to stand amongst strangers and watch them chat in a language that I do not speak. I do not always need to be part of what is going on.
3. The critical lens that I developed there deserves to be used here, which for me means advocacy for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community in spaces that often minimize us.



"They Told Us to Move" tells the story of the relocation through interviews with the residents from the Dakota community and reflections by the volunteers. "

Skills

There are things I learned for the first time and things that I was able to refine:

- Designing a research study and ensuring methods are culturally sensitive
- Conducting home visits with clients to assess their case
- Creating a theory of change model
- Navigating the complexity of when an agency downsizes
- Understanding the power dynamics between the funders and the staff



"The conditions in rental flats are deprivation, insecurity, and undignified because these too are the everyday realities of life in Singapore."
You Yenn Teo, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*

Connections

From the classroom

Problem-Solving Initiative: Access to Justice (offered through the Law School)

This course was multidisciplinary so I worked with two law students and an engineering student on a semester-long solution to a local problem, self-representation in eviction cases in Washtenaw county. This experience in housing policy and project management was helpful for my field placement.

SW 530: Introduction to Social Welfare Policy and Services

This course laid a foundation for my policy knowledge and equipped me with the skills to read in between the lines and to better understand the implications of policies, which directly translated into my work at SCC.

For my career

I was drawn to social work because I had a desire to make sure others who felt helpless like I and my family have would no longer have to feel that way. My time in Singapore also helped to articulate why I am interested in a PhD– I want to study how this feeling of helplessness is created and designed by people who implement it into entire systems. I would like to do research on how inequality is perpetuated by social welfare policy.

Advice

For anyone interested in doing social work in a global context whether that is in the US or abroad, read below:

1. It is okay to be curious and to ask questions, but before you do think through what your intentions are and how the questions may land, i.e. the impact
2. Your time might be better spent doing self-reflection on your identity and privileges than reading through a guidebook on the place that you are going.

Outcomes

During my time there I managed cases for the KeyStart housing pilot program, which is meant to help low-income families living in rental housing become home owners so that they can begin to accumulate assets and break the cycle of poverty.

My major accomplishments include:

- Compiling literature review on home ownership and asset-building in a ASEAN context.
- Conducting home visits and collecting information for cases
- Facilitating group outings for at-risk secondary school students.
- Planning a staff work plan retreat.